

March 4, 2010

GENERAL ASSEMBLY
LABOR AND PUBLIC EMPLOYEES COMMITTEE
Room 3800, Legislative Office Building
Hartford, CT 06106

RE: S.B. 300 - An Act Concerning Family and Medical Leave Benefits for
Certain Municipal Employees

Dear Senator Prague, Representative Ryan, and members of the Committee:

My name is Susan Nelson and I am counsel with CSEA/SEIU Local 2001, a union that represents 2,600 paraeducators in 35 local and regional public school districts as well as Regional Education Service Centers across Connecticut. **I am submitting this testimony in support of raised Senate Bill 300, An Act Concerning Family and Medical Leave Benefits for Certain Municipal Employees.**

I have worked closely with paraprofessionals and negotiated multiple collective bargaining agreements with local boards of education on their behalf for the past year and a half. Paras, as they are known, have been profoundly impacted by the recession because of historically low hourly wages in what was once considered a "mom's job" and the limited opportunities presented by the school calendar of 180 workdays. As the cost of medical insurance has continued to rise, paras have been forced to pay higher and higher percentages of their income for healthcare.

During negotiations for paraprofessionals in Enfield Public Schools last year, I learned that one of our members had been denied family leave to care for her elderly mother because she is not covered by the law.

Most school paraprofessionals are excluded from the Family & Medical Leave Act because they work just a few hours shy of the current minimum standard. **This means that full-time school employees can be denied the right to return to their jobs after taking leave to care for family or to undergo medical treatment.**

This is simply wrong, and cannot have been intended or understood at the time the law was first adopted.

We have proposed adding language to contracts that would extend this right to paraprofessionals our Union represents. Decades of past inequities in wages, benefits, and professional development have

often meant this important issue was sacrificed in order to address other equally pressing issues of concern to paraprofessionals.

Legislative action is the only way to right this situation. Nothing justifies the hardship placed on paraprofessionals by this inequity.

School administrators are already accommodating the rest of their regular employees with family and medical leave. Granting paraprofessionals rights under the Family & Medical leave Act would likely present a cost savings by preventing the need to replace paras who are currently forced to choose between their families' health and their jobs.

There is no reason not to pass this bill and we strongly encourage you to do so.

Thank you for hearing our voices on this critical matter.

Susan Nelson

CSEA/SEIU Local 2001 Counsel

cc: Members, Executive Council, CSEA/SEIU Local 2001
Members, Paraprofessional Council, CSEA/SEIU Local 2001

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